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RoCH:
Fandom and the nostalgic return

So it starts with looking back, it starts with a return.

susan pui san lok's (b. 1972) *RoCH (Return of the Condor Heroes) Fans & Legends* began with a wish of the London-born artist to look back at her Chinese ancestry; to relate to a culture that, simultaneously, was and wasn't her own. To make this return she took not to history books, or to unpractised traditions and customs, but instead looked to what had always connected her – and the Chinese diaspora – to their past and to each other: the television adaptations of Jin Yong's *wuxia*¹.

There are many names a project can take: it can begin with its influencing roots, its conceptual basis, and it can be modified as the work is adapted or assumes different shapes – or lives. *RoCH Fans & Legends* took its name from two elements: the title of one of Yong's most popular novels – *Return of the Condor Heroes*; and the fan community that surrounds it, that ardently discusses and is inspired by it, and transforms it into *RoCH*.

Fandom is key to *RoCH*, as it is key to lok's project, as it is key in understanding the work. But let us continue with the

¹ The simplest translation of *wuxia* – with *wu* denoting martial or military energies, and *xia* meaning a heroic or chivalrous individual – is as a genre of literature that primarily focuses on the tales of martial art heroes in ancient China (to whom the closest Western approximation would be that of the 'errant knight'). Having begun in literature, *wuxia* came nonetheless to encapsulate, from the early 20th century, film and television genres.

issue of names for a moment. Originally written in traditional Chinese, and published in serialised form from 20 May 1959 to 5 July 1961 in the Hong Kong newspaper *Ming Pao* (also owned by Jin Yong – but we will come to that), *Return of the Condor Heroes* is the second part of Yong's *The Condor Trilogy*. With no authorised translation of the novel in English, it was only with the publication of volumes 9-12 of the 36-volume *Collected Works of Jin Yong* (1975-1981) in 1976 that an official English title was released: *The Giant Eagle and Its Companion*. So how did *RoCH* come to exist? It is an explanation that can only be found in fan forums; and senior member *bliss* expresses it most eloquently:

LOCH and ROCH came about from the TV Serials that most of us grew up watching and have ingrained in our minds. Legend of the Condor Heroes came first, and is a somewhat free interpretation of the name Eagle Shooting Heroes Story. Then, since the next one was the sequel, they probably just got lazy and called it Return of the Condor Heroes ².

So it was not the author that produced the name that has come to define even the original text, it was the fan community and their appropriation, not of the book, but of the television adaptations. And it is through appropriation – of the novel, of the television and filmic adaptations, of the fan translations and their creative production, and of a collective archive – that *lok's* project has come to exist.

Lok's RoCH Fans & Legends began as an element of a larger project – *Our Ancestors* – and had its first public display as *RoCH Fans* in early 2013, as part of *The Global Archive* exhibition in Hanmi Gallery, London ³. Here it occupied the forth flour of the

² 'How did the titles LOCH and ROCH come about since it's not original?', <<http://www.spcnet.tv/forums/showthread.php/11419-How-did-the-titles-LOCH-and-ROCH-come-about-since-it-s-not-original#VrID5VIqK2w>> [accessed 12 February 2017]

³ The exhibition was curated by Marquard Smith, in collaboration with Emma Brasó and Nina Privedi, and ran from the 24th of January to the 9th of February 2013. Besides *susan pui san lok*, it featured the works of Young-In Hong (b.1972), Shezad Dawood (b.1974), and Tom Corby (b.1966) and Gavin Bailly (b.1971). M. SMITH, 'A Minor Juridical Disturbance in the Global Archive',

gallery: printouts of Google Image search results covered the walls from top to bottom; a television set played excerpts from the 1983 Hong Kong television adaptation – subtitled with fan translations; multiple translations of the work's title were written on a wall (almost as if their were part of an enchantment that needed to be cast for these heroes to finally return); colourful origami condors were placed in a circle on the floor; and a wing of a condor was drawn in black marker on the window, framing the building in front. It is this first iteration of the project, and the issues it raises – on authorship, on fan communities and diaspora, on nostalgia, on the archive – that will be analysed throughout this essay ⁴. But perhaps we should begin at the origins; perhaps we should begin with Jin Yong, with Hong Kong and with displacement.

Jin Yong: From Hong Kong to the World

In 1948, before he came to be known by his pen name – Jin Yong –, Louis Cha (Zha Liangyong) relocated to Hong Kong to assist in the establishment of the local edition of Shanghai's newspaper *Dagong bao* ⁵. Not long after, in 1949, the People's Republic of China was founded and Louis Cha, as many other Chinese nationals, chose to remain in the British colony. In the years that followed they were joined by thousands of others, with Hong Kong's population growing from 1.600.000 in late-1946 to over 2.300.000 in the spring of 1950 ⁶. A number of these people –

MaHKUscript: *Journal of Fine Art Research*, 1 (1): 9, pp. 1-9, <DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/mjfar.1>> [accessed 12 February 2017]

⁴ Since this first exhibition, elements of the project have been published as part of a special edition on the subject of the archive of the *Journal of Visual Culture* – S. PUI SAN LOK, *RoCH Fans and Legends (Entries)*, «*Journal of Visual Culture*», December 2013, 12, pp.364-374. The project has also been recently developed into *RoCH Fans & Legends* for an exhibition at Derby QUAD (Derby, UK) (19 September – 15 November 2015).

⁵ Born in 1924 in Haining, Zhejiang, to a family of scholars, Louis Cha initiated his career as a journalist in 1945 for *Dongnan ribao* in Hangzhou. During his first decade in Hong Kong Yong also collaborated in film reviews and editorials, screenplay writing, and film direction.

⁶ J. CHRISTOPHER HAMM, *Paper Swordsmen: Jin Yong and the Modern Chinese Martial Arts Novel*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005, p.43.

susan pui san lok's family included – continued their journey to settle in other countries – such as Taiwan, Australia, Canada, the US, and the UK ⁷. In their displacement, these individuals could be seen through the lens of the exiled, but perhaps a different terminology might be better suited:

Exile suggests pining for home; *diaspora* suggests networks among compatriots. Exile may be solitary, but diaspora is always collective. Diaspora suggests real or imagined relationships among scattered fellows, whose sense of community is sustained by forms of communication and contact such as kinship, pilgrimage, trade, travel, and shared culture (language, ritual, scripture, or print and electronic media) ⁸.

These networked communities might not have been pining for home, but they continued to establish relationships between themselves, and with their origins. Part of what allowed them to do so was their shared cultural values – Jin Yong fiction included. Perhaps, as lok mentions, «aspirations to settle and return may not be contradictory, and nostalgia may be understood in more complex terms than a backward gaze»⁹. Perhaps Yong's works were particularly appealing to these communities – even if they were initially consumed through the television adaptations – because they offered a mythical representation of China: «nostalgia wears a distinctly utopian face, a face that turns towards a future-past, a past which has only ideological reality»¹⁰. Jin Yong's stories were centred on noble actions, fantastical fight scenes, impossible romances, moments of conflict from

⁷ In the 1950s the UK was a particularly popular destination, as it allowed Commonwealth citizens free access to settle.

⁸ J. DURHAM PETERS, 'Nomadism, Diaspora, Exile: The Stakes of Mobility within the Western Canon,' in *House, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media and the Politics of Place*. ed. H. NAFICY, London: Routledge, 1999, pp. 17-41, p. 20.

⁹ M. SMITH, S. PUI SAN LOK, *Journeys, Documenting, Indexing, Archives, and Practice-Based Research: A Conversation with Susan pui san lok*, «Art Journal», Vol. 65, No. 4 (Winter, 2006), pp. 18-35, p.35.

¹⁰ S. STEWART, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1984, p.23.

Chinese history ¹¹, and heroes that start as outsiders until the moment they prove themselves worthy of belonging to the community ¹². These were «lonely, homeless, fatherless [heroes], ceaselessly wandering on an endless journey» ¹³. They travelled a world that was always *just* on the margin of society, the world of *jianghu* – the world of Rivers and Lakes. Perhaps the nostalgia that was felt was not for the place that had had to be abandoned, but for a place that had never been.

Still, as widespread as Jin Yong's works were, his largest readership continued to be based in Hong Kong. On 1 January 1957, the first instalment of what would come to be known as *Legends of the Condor Heroes* was published in the Hong Kong newspaper *Xianggang shangbao*. By then Yong, having written two previous serialised novels, was starting to be an acknowledged *wuxia* writer ¹⁴. Nonetheless, the success *LoCH* garnered surpassed all preceding accomplishments and enabled Yong to establish his own newspaper: *Ming Pao*.

Ming Pao was launched with the first instalment of *RoCH* in May 1959. With a focus on fiction, witty editorials, and a positioning that was simultaneously nationalistic and critical of the policies of the Chinese Communist Party, the newspaper soon made a name for itself. It became difficult to disentangle the popularity

¹¹ Many of the novels are set at periods when China was under attack, or at risk of being occupied, by foreign powers. *The Condor Trilogy*, for instance, begins during the Jurchen Invasion of China (around 1127 AD) and the establishment of the Jin Empire. It continues, through the sequels, to the Mongol Invasion of early 1200s and the foundation, and subsequent fall, of the Yuan Dynasty (c. 1271 AD - c. 1368 AD).

¹² Again, there are fans that are extremely articulate in their views as to the popularity of Jin Yong's novels. On analysing Guo Jing, the main character of *LoCH*, *Owbyhx* mentions: «Guo Jing articulates a typical 'diaspora fantasy' of being a foreign-born person who returns to the motherland, gets over his status as a half-foreign 'cultural retard' (which GJ's so-called dumbness is really just a metaphor for), and is eventually counted among the most local of his countrymen - a fantasy which is surely deeply appealing to many of the posters here.» in 'Jin Yong's depiction of the Juchen Jin Empire in LOCH', <<http://www.spcnet.tv/forums/showthread.php/5785-Jin-Yong-s-depiction-of-the-Juchen-Jin-Empire-in-LOCH#VrHtk1IqK2w>> [accessed 12 February 2017]

¹³ A. HUSS, J. LIU (ed.), *The Jin Yong Phenomenon: Chinese Martial Arts Fiction and Modern Chinese Literary History*, New York: Cambria Press, p.11.

¹⁴ *The Book and the Sword* was published in Hong Kong's *The New Evening Post* between 8 February 1955 and 5 September 1956, and *Sword Stained with Royal Blood* was serialised in *Hong Kong Commercial Daily* between 1 January 1956 and 31 December 1956.

of Yong's works of fiction from the popularity – and respectability – of his newspaper. If on the one hand fans purchased the paper for the serialised novels, reading the politically controversial editorials almost as an extra, on the other hand readers looking for a point of view that challenged that of the left and of the People's Republic of China were nevertheless exposed to Yong's fiction – and to its nostalgic recalling of a Chinese spirit, of an admirable Chinese past.

With an impossible love story between two members of distinct martial arts sects at the centre of its plot ¹⁵, *RoCH* transformed an established writer into a sensation. Readers began analysing and discussing Jin Yong's stories to such an extent that a name was even given to this study: *Jinology*. Yong continued to write and publish new tales (15 in total) until the early 1970s, at which point – at a time when film and television adaptations of his work were increasingly widespread ¹⁶ – he stopped and started to revise – and rewrite – every single one of his works instead.

In November 1998 a three-day conference on the scholarly study of Yong as a master novelist was held in Taipei. Amongst its principal sponsors were two of the publishing houses that carried Yong's works. And as multiple adaptations (from comic books and illustrated novels to television series and films) were promoted or launched during this week, the conference became, for the most part, a marketing coup. The difference between buying the book and TV show soundtrack bundle or a book of conversations between the author and Japanese philosopher Daisaku Ikeda became very much diminished ¹⁷. It was all part of

¹⁵ The male lead, Yang Guo, is a rebellious orphan who is taken by his father's sworn brother (Guo Jing – the leading character in *Legend of the Condor Heroes*) to a mythic martial arts community in Peach Blossom Island. After running away, he meets Xiaolongnü, a disciple of the Ancient Tomb (an all-female martial arts sect), saving her from an attack by Taoist priests. Xiaolongnü takes Yang Guo as a student, which hinders their romance, as martial arts laws forbid relationships between master and pupil.

¹⁶ For the *RoCH* project susan pui san lok has catalogued over 90 adaptations on *The Condor Trilogy*, many of which started being made only one or two years after the initial publications of the series. S. PUI SAN LOK, *Adaptations*, <<https://susanpuisanlok.wordpress.com/roch-fans/adaptations-2>> [accessed 12 February 2017]

¹⁷ J. CHRISTOPHER HAMM, *Paper Swordsmen: Jin Yong and the Modern Chinese Martial Arts Novel*, p.116.

one work. Yong's oeuvre became not a simple series of books; it turned into a hybridised piece composed by the written text, the filmic and television adaptations, and the fan contributions. Such might not be very different from the handling of popular books in the West – Hollywood adaptations tend to be aggressively marketed and are, at times, endorsed by the author itself¹⁸. What is impressive in Yong is the scale of it; it is the number of works deriving from the original texts – at present there are well over 100 film and television adaptations alone – but it is also the easy incorporation Yong makes of these works into his own novels. It is unusual for a writer to revise any of his works and remove inconsistencies detected by fans; it is even more unusual for characters popular in television adaptations to suddenly gain more prominence in the book; but for an author to make such revisions on all of his books not once but twice, that is something that has possibly not been witnessed many times before¹⁹.

But why has he done so? In an attempt to market his works once again? Given the popularity of the books is marketing even a necessity? Perhaps it goes back to how the novels came to be in the first place. Serialised stories are not novel – Charles Dickens and Alexandre Dumas published serials in the 19th century –, and they tend to facilitate the contact between reader and author. Fans were as quick to write in with suggestions on Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* as they are in reviewing the latest television adaptation of *RoCH*. The difference is that Yong owned the newspaper that was publishing his works, and by having full control of *Ming Pao* he had full control of the distribution of his stories. «One prominent strategy [was] an insistence on the popularity of Jin Yong's work, cast not as mere self-celebration but as an extension of the newspaper's overall populist stance, an expression of solidarity between the paper and its readers»²⁰. This

¹⁸ J. COLLINS, *Bring on the Books for Everybody*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2010, p.151.

¹⁹ Jin Yong published the first round of revisions during the 1970s and 1980s. Between 1999 and 2006 Yong worked on a second revision of all his works, which is known to fans as the 'Third Edition'.

²⁰ J. CHRISTOPHER HAMM, *Paper Swordsmen: Jin Yong and the Modern Chinese Martial Arts Novel*, p.171.

solidarity came through particularly in the prominence given to fan letters. By publishing and responding to correspondence, Jin Yong cultivated a dedicated fan-base that came to feel as if they were participants in the development of the story: *Write in, let me know what you think, and maybe you will be surprised with what you find in the next instalment.*

Fans took to this call; they wrote in. However, they also started writing for themselves, they began to organise discussion groups and communities. And the Chinese diaspora developed a *RoCH* community of its own, although one first born out of the television adaptations.

Fandom and a Mutable Archive

In a television screen, placed to one side of the gallery room, susan pui san lok presented viewers with clips of the 1983 Hong Kong adaptation of *RoCH*. They did not form a specific episode, rather they offered glimpses of a narrative. They stood for the viewer as a point of contact to this mythical China, just as they had for lok in her childhood:

The Condor Trilogy arrived at our doorstep ... Bootleg videos in plastic bags, delivered to our home, via a local network of first generation Chinese immigrants who maintained regular connections with Hong Kong. So these videos were being flown or shipped over weekly and we would get our weekly fixes of the latest popular Hong Kong drama ²¹.

It was these videos, of martial arts and *wuxia*, that «allowed those of Chinese origins in other parts of the world ... to imagine their cultural heritage and relation to China» ²². It was through these cinematic histories that members of these communities

²¹ Animate Projects – ‘Interview with susan pui san lok’, <http://animateprojectsarchive.org/interviews/interview_with_susan_pui_san_lok> [accessed 12 February 2017]

²² K. SZETO, *The Martial Arts Cinema of the Chinese Diaspora: Ang Lee, John Woo, and Jackie Chan in Hollywood*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2011, p.18.

continued to establish bonds; continued to actively discuss the latest episodes (almost as if they were gossiping about common acquaintances); and continued to debate what really mattered: *what has happened to our favourite character*. In many ways such debates might have foretold those that would be held years later in online forums. Perhaps there are ways in which the online community might be comparable to a diasporic community.

«[F]andom gathers a live, communal audience for stories, and fans have adapted and adopted every mode of communication»²³. Such live communication might be established in the physical presence of another, or, as we find in online forums, in a virtual presence. The truth is that for most fans it doesn't really matter how the works are being discussed as long as there is a chance to discuss them. Arguably, this absence of physicality might actually promote a kind of fandom that is inherently nostalgic. The virtual community begins to stand in for an idealised group of people, with fans longing for the time they are able to spend within it.

For fans don't just write to comment on favourite scenes or express their appreciation for the author. They immerse themselves into every instant of the novels and adaptations: they break down the fight choreographies, they have heated debates on the best leading man²⁴, they revise the revisions and suggest new changes²⁵, they even collaborate in the translation of 500-page books²⁶. A communal process that has given numerous readers access to works that would otherwise have been beyond their reach.

The notion of a collective intelligence²⁷ – of the contribution of multiple individual interpretations to form a unit – is a strong

²³ F. COPPA, 'Writing Bodies in Space' in K. HELLEKSON and K. BUSSE (ed.), *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader*, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2014, pp. 218-237, p.232.

²⁴ 'Best RoCH adaptation?', <<http://www.spcnet.tv/forums/showthread.php/13012-Best-ROCH-adaptation#.VrCdfVIqK2w>> [accessed 12 February 2017]

²⁵ 'Third Edition Changes', <<http://www.spcnet.tv/forums/showthread.php/12038-Third-edition-changes#.VrCgBFIqK2y>> [accessed 12 February 2017]

²⁶ 'RoCH Translation...8 onwards', <<http://www.spcnet.tv/forums/showthread.php/763-ROCH-Translation-8-onwards#.VrCgd1IqK2w>> [accessed 12 February 2017]

²⁷ H. JENKINS, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, NY: New York University Press, 2006, p.4.

aspect in lok's project. It is present in the incorporation of fan translations and subtitles in the video component. It is present in the image appropriations that constitute the *RoCH* Archive. It is present in the folding and refolding of an origami pattern – that in its sameness continues nevertheless to carry singular hesitations and missteps. And it is present in the multiple incarnations of the book's title.

Arranged as a list – or maybe as a poem – on the gallery wall, the process of translation becomes at once a movement, or a progression, for a *return*. It begins with the word *Shén...*, transforming then into *San...*, *Sun...*, *Sin...* or *Shin...*, before a mistake is made – a miscalculated placement of something Western audiences might begin to recognise –, before it turns into *Divine Eagle*, *Gallant Knight*, *Legendary Couple*, and, finally, *Return of the Condor Heroes* ²⁸. Between each of these moments there is an interval – a lag – that can be seen as a stand-in for the 'cultural lag' susan pui san lok marks as a nostalgic trigger: «This feeling of being slightly out of step with, or out of time within, culture or cultures ... For me, I think I first started thinking about cultural lag in relation to being in England and yearning for Hong Kong» ²⁹.

Each generation can be somewhat defined by what they have been exposed to as children, and from the second half of the 20th century this has included television series. Consciously or not, people have been shaped by them. For children of the Chinese diaspora, *The Condor Trilogy* adaptations became their defining television series. For lok it might even have been *RoCH* that developed such a yearning for Hong Kong; that made her aware of the abovementioned lag. For others (as we find in one of the leading forums for Asian drama, spcnet.tv ³⁰), it came to define

²⁸ The complete list susan pui san lok presents is as follows: *Shén Diāo Xiá Lǚ* / *San4 Diu1 Haap6 Leoi5* / *San Diu Hap Lui* / *Sun Diu Hap Lui* / *Sin Tiau1 Hap Lui* / *Shin Chou Kyou Ryo* / *Shin Cho Kyo Ryo* / *Thần Điều Hiệp Lữ* / *Kembalinya Sang Pendakar Rajawali* / *Divine Eagle*, *Gallant Knight* / *The Legendary Couple* / *Return of The Condor Heroes*.

²⁹ Animate Projects – 'Interview with susan pui san lok'.

³⁰ Written in English, and based in the UK, spcnet.tv is dedicated to the review of Asian drama (particularly film and television series). With over 60.000 active members, 770.000 posts, and 16.000 threads on the site, a single thread on the Third Edition revisions of Jin Yong's novels

their relationship with the original stories; it came to shape their consciousness of *RoCH*:

Wkeej: Have not read a single novel in my life. The latest ROCH (China series which I watch 2 episodes is so different from the early adaptations. Even R= Romance instead of Return ... Not sure whether it is good/bad ³¹.

CC: Now I can't remember this part (if it was in the book or I saw it on screen) ... Anyone else have this problem? Read the book twice over but still get mixed up thanks to watching the TV series 3 times ³².

From the aggregation of these recollections *RoCH* emerges. For, as Barthes noted: «The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination» ³³ – the unity lies with the reader, with the fandom, with the collective intelligence. From the very beginning Jin Yong's works were associated with the need for a communal contribution, with a need to collect – a need to archive – by fans. «The earliest 'book' versions of Jin Yong's novels were the compilations of devoted readers, who cut the daily instalments from the newspaper and pasted or sewed them into homemade volumes» ³⁴. *lok's RoCH* can be seen as a continuation of this tradition: not in its use of existing physical material but in its appropriation of digital references and images.

now carries over 200.000 views (viewers do not need to be members). The website holds subpages on popular television series catalogued geographically ('Korean Drama', 'Chinese TV Series', 'HKTV Dramas', etc.), pages on 'Movies' and 'Music', and pages on 'Actor' and 'Actresses', but its most lively section is unquestionably the 'Forums'. Here fans can share news on productions and entertainment, chat about gaming and sports, or offer support to life's dilemmas in 'Life after School'. Fans can also express their creativity in the 'Creative Minds' section, where the overwhelming majority of fan contributions are related to *wuxia* – particularly Jin Yong's *wuxia*.

³¹ 'Adaptation vs Original Novel', <<http://www.spcnet.tv/forums/showthread.php/13446-Adaptations-vs-Original-Novel#.VrCqR1IqK2w>> [accessed 12 February 2017]

³² 'Xiao Feng vs. Guo Jing', <<http://www.spcnet.tv/forums/showthread.php/6694-Xiao-Feng-vs-Guo-Jing#.VrCrmVIqK2x>> [accessed 12 February 2017]

³³ R. BARTHES, 'The Death of the Author.' in *Image/Music/Text*. Translated by S. Heath, New York: Hill & Wang, 1977, pp.142-148, p.148.

³⁴ J. CHRISTOPHER HAMM, *Paper Swordsmen: Jin Yong and the Modern Chinese Martial Arts Novel*, p.181.

As mentioned above, part of the project involved lok covering the gallery walls with printouts of Google Image search results. Rows upon rows of minuscule images, representing only a fraction of an endless – and mutable – online archive. The titles she had collected and listed were now repeated in the search queries – traditional and simplified Chinese characters, romanizations of Mandarin and Cantonese, Indonesian, Vietnamese and English translations. These printouts did not include every result, rather they were a sample of a much larger picture constructed and appropriated by the artist. lok might skip ahead to page 3 for instance, or might combine the ending of one page with the beginning of another. Her goal was not to produce an album of the written text – a completed book one could return to – but to capture glimpses of an ever-expanding, ever-changing, digital archive.

Nonetheless, although a viewer might not initially perceive the importance of the written word when coming across the archival component of the *RoCH* project, words are central to its creation. It is true that words might be seen primarily as part of the source material, however they also exist as the searches that produce the image selection. As much as it would be fascinating to meet the results of a fully developed search engine that could quickly, and easily, find images based solely on previous images – that which is called a Content-Based Retrieval System –, the fact is that current technologies are still limited to search by associated text. Images are found not by similarities in their content (their colour, shape, or texture) but by concepts, by correspondences in their metadata: by keywords. Images are found through the subjective descriptions someone – anyone – added to them. So, in truth, lok is not merely creating a visual archive of *RoCH*; by exploring the technological limitations of Image Retrieval Systems (particularly those of Google Image) she is creating an archive of the *interpretation* of *RoCH*. An interpretation that is mutable: from language to language, from day to day, from user to user. It is a search where the text becomes as much the original

book – represented by its multiple covers and editions – as a scene from the most recent adaptation; an image of the actor that has come to stand in for the main character; the profile picture of an eager fan; or even the act of reading itself – denoted by the open book, the page about to be turned. In *RoCH, Return of the Condor Heroes* does not become a single written work; it no longer has – if ever it did – a single rendering. It is the merging – and converging³⁵ – of a multitude of mediums and representations, all of them contained within the archive.

It is possible that the infinite collaborative expansion of the archive – the artwork – might come to, through the recognition of an impossibility of return, bridge the distance of a nostalgia-inducing lag: «I was interested in the impossibility of ever ‘knowing’ or ‘seeing’ the archive in its entirety, not least because its disparate body is ever-expanding – no amount of time could catch up with all the time ‘caught’»³⁶.

So, in the end, what is *RoCH*? Is it a novel, a serialised tale that, through myth, mirrored some of the conflicts that were being lived at the time of its production? Is it a series of television adaptations that permitted ties with a place of origin to be kept by the diaspora? Is it an artwork, an archive, a way of processing an unsurpassable lag? Perhaps it is simply an impossible *return* of – or to – heroes that never were. Perhaps it might be easier to consider *RoCH* as the combination of all of the above: as part of a collective intelligence, as part of the memories of a community.

³⁵ JENKINS, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, p.3.

³⁶ M. SMITH, S. PUI SAN LOK, “Journeys, Documenting, Indexing, Archives, and Practice-Based Research: A Conversation with Susan pui san lok”, p.28.